

[Rev. D. D. Tidwell]

1

FOLKWAYS

William V. Ervin, P. W.

Stephenville,

Erath County,

District 8.

2225 words.

File 240

Page 1. Reference

Address delivered by Rev. D. D. Tidwell, Stephenville, before the Erath County Baptist Association, September 16, 1936, at Morgan Mill. Text of the address published in the Stephenville Empire-Tribune of October 2, 1936. Clements & Higgs, publishers, Stephenville.

[We?]. . .pay tribute of respect to a representative minister who pioneered the gospel in this section. The purpose of this service today is to keep green the memory of those worthy "prophets of the long trail" by a brief review of the life and labors of Reverend Reuben D. Ross.

Rev. Ross was not the first preacher in this section. He was preceded by [?] men was William Robinson, Isaac Reed, Samuel H. Powers, Daniel Shipman and possibly a few others. In September, 1855, Rev. Wm. Robinson preached the first sermon ever heard in

Library of Congress

what later became Erath county. In the spring of 1856 Rev. Robinson settled on Paluxy Creek, and the following year organized the Paluxy and Stephenville churches. In 1858 and 1859 he constituted Leon (later reorganized as Dublin) and Antioch. All of these churches being at the time in Erath county. Thus Rev. Robinson preceded Rev. Ross some ten years in this section.

Reuben D. Ross was born September 26, 1824, in Lauderdale county, Alabama, the descendant of pioneering people. He was reared to manhood on his father's farm in Franklin county, Alabama, receiving a fair education. In 1849 he married Miss Martha A. Thompson, who died September 12, 1875. They had nine children, all of whom are now dead. On May 25, 1876, Rev. Ross was married to Miss Nancy A. Howell. They had seven children, six of whom are living. [???

Rev. Ross was converted to Christianity in 1844 at the age of twenty, and united with a Baptist church in Alabama. In the latter part of the 20 fifties he was licensed to preach. In 1862 he removed to Harrison county. . . In June, 1865, he pre-empted 160 acres of land on Armstrong Creek and established his home on the frontier. At that time he was the only Baptist preacher residing in Erath county. In a short time he was called to the pastorate of the Leon Church, and not long afterwards to Stephenville. Rev. Ross was also pastor of the old Comanche church during the late sixties or early seventies.

The pioneer minister dared the dangers of the frontier, the perils of unblazed trails, and the lurking red man that he might mark spiritual paths that are today well-beaten roads.

It is difficult for us to imagine the hardships under which Rev. Ross labored. His churches were miles away from his home. This meant that his family was left to face the danger of Indian raids alone. It was necessary for him to go prepared for any emergency so he rode a large yellow horse of good racing ability, carried two guns, his Bible and hymn book. Rev. Ross often stated that he could whip all the Indians that he could not outrun. Sometimes danger from the Indians became so acute that he dared not travel during

Library of Congress

daylight and would wait until nightfall to go on to and from his appointments. In after years he said that it was one of the happiest moments of his life when he could lay his guns aside.

Let us endeavor to visualize a typical early day church service. The congregation gathering at a little log church building, coming by foot, horseback and some in ox wagons. The preacher arrives on horseback, two pistols strapped to his side, his Bible and hymn book in his saddle bags. As the men enter the building their guns are stacked conveniently in a corner, while the preacher lays his pistols near his Bible and hymn book. Sometimes the service was conducted beneath the [friendly (?) of a stately 3 oak and occasionally the crack of a rifle was the speedy benediction that broke up the service.

In November, 1869, thirteen messengers from seven Baptist churches in five counties met in convention at Paluxy and organized "an Association west of the Brazos", the extreme frontier of that day. This association was known as the Bosque river and is mother of the Comanche, Paluxy, Meridian and Erath County Associations. Rev. Ross was one of the four preachers present and served as the first moderator. Indian raids were so frequent that the messengers and preachers [?] wore their pistols and a guard was stationed to watch the horses and sound a warning. On Sunday night the Indians raided the settlement and stole horses within a mile of the meeting place. This broke up the association and the messengers hurried home without hearing any committee reports.

On one occasion a starving Indian brave dashed into/ the house of a neighbor of Rev. Ross, scooped his hands into the beans and other food, and began ravenously to eat. The mother was some distance from the house, but she heard the frightened screams of the children, some of whom had hidden under the bed and various places, while one dashed from the house to tell mother that a "black [?] was in the house". Rev. Ross and another man happened to be nearby and hearing the commotion they rushed up. The other man raised his gun to kill the Indian, but Rev. Ross restrained him as the Indian made the sign of the cross. They carried the Indian to Dublin where he was kept for several days, being

Library of Congress

allowed to sleep in Big Bill Keith's store, and later was exchanged at Fort Sill for a white child.

Following the close of the Civil War lawlessness and disorder [?] were rampant, and the State government organized companies of men with police powers in different sections of the county. Politics likely 4 entered into the system and many people bitterly opposed it. A company had been organized at old Dublin, composed largely of the Keiths, O'Neals and Morrisons. This move of the administration was opposed by Colonel Buck Barry of Bosque county, one of the best known characters of Western Texas. The situation was aggravated and feeling ran so high that Colonel Barry and his followers agreed to meet the Keith clan and fight it out. The Barry clan numbered something like one hundred and the Keith clan more than one hundred men. Both companies were filled with trained marksmen, veterans of the late war and skilled Indian fighters. The clans moved towards one another and were only a mile or two apart when Rev. Reuben Ross appeared on the scene. He was a friend of the Keiths, but known over the country as a good man, fair and impartial. Under a white flag Rev. Ross met Colonel Barry and his followers and made a plea for the settlement of the differences. After one or two trips between the parties a conference was agreed on with Col. Barry representing his company and Big Bill Keith the other, together with another man, whose name is not recalled, and Rev. Ross. The differences were finally settled, all returned to their homes, and so far as is known the feud was never revived. The good women of Dublin, knowing the seriousness of the situation, conceived the idea of sending Rev. Ross with the hope that he might be able to stop hostilities. The tragedy told can hardly be appreciated by us today. If the companies had met in battle scores would have been killed, as both clans were filled with experienced fighters and brave as ever carried guns. If Rev. Ross had never performed any other service than this, it would be sufficient to enroll his name among the renowned pioneer citizens of this section.

Along the frontier Rev. Ross was known as Comanche Rube, and under this title he frequently wrote articles to the Texas Baptist Herald. 5 A somewhat simple fellow embraced the Baptist faith and became obsessed with the idea that he was called to

Library of Congress

preach. Rev. Ross recognized his lack of judgement, but being unable to persuade him otherwise, he discovered that he could memorize readily and repeat word for word any sermon given him. Rev. Ross prepared a sermon and gave it to him to memorize, concluding to test the young fellow at his next appointment at Leon. The service was held in an old school house with a large fireplace. The congregation formed a circle about the fire while the preacher occupied a place before the fire facing the circle. Rev. Ross led a song and the young man was introduced. He repeated his text and launched into the sermon that astonished his hearers. As he proceeded he spoke more rapidly as he repeated Rev. Ross' sermon word for word. When he was about half through an old fox hound belonging to Nick Keith pushed into a corner near the fire behind the preacher. Someone sitting near the fire picked up the redhot poker and gave the hound a punch. The dog raised a howl, broke for the door and in his wild getaway ran between the legs of the preacher, upsetting him and leaving him sitting on the floor, and overturning the table that was being used for a pulpit. When the uproar was over the young man was blank as he had lost the thread of the discourse. Rev. Ross made a few remarks and closed with prayer. The news got out that Rev Ross had [primed?] the young man by writing a sermon and letting him memorize it. After that the young man was referred to as "Brother Ross' derringer".

Rev. Ross was possessed of a keen sense with humor. As the frontier villages began to grow into towns the women became anxious that Rev. Ross should dress up a bit. True son of the soil he was satisfied with his homespun garments prepared by his faithful wife. As the time for the Association drew near and he was to preach the introductory sermon the 6 ladies did some plotting. They decided to give him a new [stiff-bosomed?] shirt to insure the fact that he would wear a tie. Those who remember the old stiff-bosomed shirt will recall how they opened in the back. You can imagine the chagrin of the ladies when Rev. Ross appeared in the new shirt, but with it on hind part before and open down the front! He calmly and [serenely?] preached the associational sermon as if he were unaware that anything was wrong with his appearance.

Library of Congress

His ministry was a remarkable one in many respects. He was thoroughly conservative, and his long ministry was singularly free from discord. For [?] ten or twelve years he was pastor at Stephenville and for fourteen at Dublin. As the infirmities came on he confined his work to Round Grove where he established a record for a pastorate in Erath county. He was the first pastor and he served them more than [?] thirty-seven years. He was a pastor in Erath county for forty-three consecutive years.

In addition to his pastoral work, Rev. Ross taught school upon first coming to this section, served as the neighborhood physician and farmed to pay expenses. He did a great deal of missionary work, preached to the cowboys in their camps and to the new settlements on the extreme frontier. In July of 1871 he organized the Round Grove church; the following year he organized the Leon church at Dublin.

During all his ministerial career his remuneration was [meag?], and the support of his family depended upon his wise management of his farm. He managed to add other tracts of land to his original homestead and spent his last years in comfort. Failing health and loss of his voice prevented him from preaching very much in his last years. His death occurred on December 29, 1906. He was buried in the Round Grove cemetery.

Sometimes during the latter years of his life he [penned?] the following 7 remarkable poem entitled:

RESIGNATION Thy way be mine; Thou leadest me Through waters still and deep, The dusk of years is over me; I lay me down to sleep. Each soul that lives is crucified, Each calls at last to Thee. Each wretched heart hath bowed and cried [?] Thou remember me". Lord, God of Hosts, with me abide At my Gethsemane. Thy way be mine; Thou leadest me Thy path of countless souls, No way but Thine can comfort me— The key my master holds, When darkness falls and endless mists [?] all for which I pine Grant, Lord of Hosts, that through the rifts There be some word or sign. Give me, O God, the faith that lifts [one's?] spirit unto thine. Thy way be mine; Thou leadest me From darkness unto light.

Library of Congress

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, But spare the dread of night. Lead kindly, Lord, unto the plane Where earth and heaven meet; And ere I see my Maker's face, Make Thou my peace complete; Guard and protect me, Lord of Grace Before Thy mercy seat.